



Date: February 6, 2017

To: The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman  
The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner  
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC, 20554

From: Eric Brown, President and CEO  
California Telehealth Network

Subject: **Rural Health Care Program, WC Docket No. 02-60**  
**Pending Request for Short-Term Emergency Funding Cap Relief**

In the small rural town of Tehachapi, California, located 3,900 feet above sea level in the mountains between the San Joaquin Valley and the Mojave Desert, a young mother elects to have her baby at home under the care of a midwife. During the delivery, complications emerge and the baby needs to be seen by a doctor. The family rushes the baby to the local Critical Access Hospital operated by the Tehachapi Valley Health District. The hospital participates in the California Telehealth Network consortium and utilizes a broadband connection that is subsidized through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF). This connection enables the Tehachapi hospital emergency room doctors to conduct a video conference with specialist at the Valley Children’s Hospital, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Madera, California over 170 miles and nearly a 2 1/2-hour drive away. The NICU specialists advise the local doctors over an HCF funded broadband connection and the baby’s life is saved.

In the small, remote desert communities in Imperial County, children are now receiving speech therapy within the Clinicas De Salud Del Pueblo Community Health Centers over HCF-subsidized broadband circuits that make possible live telemedicine virtual consultations with speech therapists at Rady Children’s Hospital in San Diego, 120 miles east and over 2 hours by car. Children in these remote communities are now receiving treatments they would not otherwise qualify for because of how far they live from the hospital. In fact, one child in Calexico, now able to participate in therapy each month via telemedicine, has not actually spoken to a clinician in a face to face visit, but is now speaking and interacting with telemedicine specialists.

These are a sampling of many actual, real world occurrences that every day illustrate the importance of the federal universal service fund and more specifically the FCC Healthcare Connect Fund broadband subsidies. The California Telehealth Network serves over 450 safety net health care providers in rural and medically underserved California communities like Tehachapi and Imperial County. Demand for HCF subsidized broadband services has never been higher with the growing financial challenges faced by

rural health care providers, the expansion of electronic health records, health information exchange and coordinated care efforts.

Recently the FCC Rural Health Care program reached its \$400 million funding cap for the first time in program history. As a result, new HCP applicants are barred from the program for the remainder of the 2016 funding year, and many participating HCPs face reductions to the amount of funding they would otherwise receive. Without immediate FCC action, many HCPs in communities like Tehachapi will be unable to afford broadband connections and thus will lose access to vital broadband enabled health care services never before available in these rural communities. The California Telehealth Network and other HCF consortia across the country request prompt attention to this matter so that the important work to address rural health care disparities can continue.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Request for Short-Term Emergency Funding Cap Relief, WC Docket No. 02-60 (Letter from Jeffrey Mitchell, Counsel for the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition, to the FCC Chairman and Commissioners, Nov. 30, 2016) [https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/11302679329872/201611%20Letter%20from%20SHLB%20Petitioners%20re%20Interim%20RHC%20Cap%20Relief%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/11302679329872/201611%20Letter%20from%20SHLB%20Petitioners%20re%20Interim%20RHC%20Cap%20Relief%20(FINAL).pdf). Letter participants included:

CTN

New England Telehealth Consortium

Health Information Exchange Of Montana

Utah Telehealth Network

OCHIN

Texas Health Information Network Collaborative

Kentucky Telehealth Consortium

Colorado Telehealth Network

Southwest Telehealth Access Grid

Palmetto State Providers Network